

WINTER GAMES

This Luger Is a Winner

BY JANET THOMAS
Church Magazines

Meet a girl who won't let athletic success cause her faith to slide.

When Kate Hansen was 10 her father drove her to Slider Search, a local clinic being held for kids to try out for luge. "I tell people that luge is like bobsledding," says Kate. "At the clinic, they set up hay bales and cones on the street and then let the kids ride a trainer sled with wheels down the course. I went through the cones without crashing. I remember it being really fun. Plus they wanted to see how well I took direction."

As a result of the clinic, both Kate and her cousin were invited to come to Lake Placid, New York, where the national luge training facility is located. The first time Kate tried out



a real sled on an ice course, she loved it. It was fast and fun. "It's like a roller coaster but pretty relaxing. It's very flowing."

The whole idea that riding something going so fast, just inches from crashing into walls of ice, would hardly seem relaxing to most people. But this ability to relax while moving has been the secret to Kate's success.

Her mother, Kathie, remembers seeing her go down a run for the first time. She says, "It's nerve-racking when you watch your daughter go by, and she's going so fast. I wondered, 'What have we had gotten into?' The coaches don't know how she does it. She can have a bad start, but as soon as she is through the first curve, she's leading everyone because she's settling in and relaxing and just feeling the curves."

Her mother thinks the ability to relax might come from Kate's skateboarding and surfing, two popular activities in La Cañada, California, where the Hansen family lives. "Kate used to lay down on her skateboard, going down the driveway with her ponytail dragging."



PHOTOGRAPHS BY MATT REIER, MARK WEINBERG, AND COURTESY OF THE HANSEN FAMILY



verizon

verizon

USA LUGA

KATE

NORTON

NORTON

XIX OLYMPIC WINTER GAMES



LUGE

Luge is a sledding event, like bobsledding, tobogganing, or skeleton. It originated in St. Moritz, Austria. Racers ride face-up and feet-first on a small one- or two-person sled. Steering is done by flexing the sled's runners ("steels") with the calf of each leg or exerting shoulder pressure to the seat.

Kate won the women's singles Junior Luge World Championship last year. She is the youngest ever to take the top spot.



While learning this new sport, Kate says, "I was just the girl from California who had her ukulele. Before races some people warm up by sitting in the corner, staying really focused. Others zone everyone out. Then there are those who listen to music and dance. I was one who danced and sang, trying to keep my mind off of what I was doing. That's when I did well. I was just there for fun."

A Sled Named Ricky

Each year at the USA training facility, Kate is given a sled for the season. Last year she named her sled Ricardo—Ricky for short. "It's your baby," says Kate. "You take care of it."

The sled is built to her size and can be adjusted slightly. "My sled is a lot different. I like it loose because it's easier to steer. I did really well on it." Kate does everything for her sled. She sands the steel runners. After races she puts oil on the steels so they won't rust. She packs it carefully when traveling. "If you drop Ricky, you have to apologize," she jokes.

Going with the Flow

Kate Hansen and her family haven't had a real plan for her participation in luge. They seem to take and evaluate opportunities as they come. Heidi, Kate's older sister, explains, "My brothers and I thought it was

funny because she was lugging, and no one really knows what that is. We thought she would only do it for a while, but then she would do well and get invited to train or to be on teams, so our family would say, 'I guess she'll move up.'"

Eventually Kate started to get noticed. In her first junior international competition at the junior level, she came in third, shocking everyone because she was so young and inexperienced. A few months later, at 15, she came in first at the Junior World Championship. She was only the third American to ever win. She now spends most of the winter months living with the team in Europe and competing on the Junior World Cup Tour. Her name has started rising to the top.

With the upcoming 2010 Winter Olympics, Kate will be invited to participate in the Olympic trials. There are only three slots on the team, and most of the competitors are much older. Kate finished sixth overall at the end of last season and looks forward to competing for a spot on the team. Whether she makes it or not, Kate has had fun participating and succeeding in luge, but it will not become the only focus in her life.

Finding the Balance

Kate's mom and dad worry about their daughter's keeping the right balance. "Mom didn't want me to miss out on high school," says Kate.

Kate is involved in school activities when she is home and maintains excellent grades. "Our goal is that she is going to college," says her mother. "And her seminary teacher, Sister





Frandsen, is kind enough to digitally record seminary every morning. We then e-mail the seminary recordings to Kate each week so she can listen to the classes. It is one of her spiritual foundations and a link to home when she is on the road.”

To help focus her goals, Kate has received her patriarchal blessing. In her blessing she was told that she would be watched by many people and would have missionary opportunities come to her.

Even so, Kate faces some hard situations when it comes to the party atmosphere that accompanies sports. It seems that drinking can become a stumbling point, especially when the team goes to Europe to compete. “After races, it’s party time. Everyone I met would drink. At first, I felt like the loner in the hotel. But I got over that feeling. My teammates knew better than to ask me to drink with them. After I won the worlds, my competitors would say, ‘Kate, you have to drink tonight.’ But I’d say no. My teammates would say, ‘No, she doesn’t drink. Don’t even ask.’”

Testimony Is It

Having a strong testimony is the bottom line for Kate. She is always excited to go to young women camp and youth conference with her stake. When asked about her favorite scripture, Kate mentions an experience she had while attending Especially for Youth. She hadn’t planned to bear her testimony, but then she had a feeling that someone there needed to hear what she had to say. She had been reading in her scriptures and had come upon Mosiah 8:18: “Thus God has provided a means that man, through faith, might work mighty miracles; therefore he becometh a great benefit to his fellow beings.”

Kate says, “I stood up and talked about my patriarchal blessing where it says I would be an example to others and people would be watching me. Now it’s my favorite scripture because it came as an answer to me.” It seems that people are indeed watching Kate and what she chooses to do. At the end of the season, two of her teammates said they had stopped drinking because of her. “It was the biggest reward I have ever received,” says Kate. **NE**

